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ABSTRACT

Increasingly, the concern for working in a socially responsible way has become an issue not only in the United States but internationally as well. One recurring theme in professionalized adult education today in the United States is learning for earning. The options for being socially relevant in 1996 seem to be in stark relief. Learning for earning is putting the entire institutional educational system to work for the market to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. Bromley (1989) suggests that the poststructuralists' critique could be used to make the Marxist analysis more inclusive. This can be done through identity politics, which use poststructural insights on the nature of subjectivity without losing the political commitment of Marxism. Postmodernism is appropriate and useful but it also presents a problem. Its usefulness is based on its challenge to the overdependence on rationality. One danger is that of multiple subjectivities, which lead to inaction. Breton and Plumb (1992) advocate "living within truth," which contributes to movements whose primary purpose is always to have an impact on society, not to affect the power structure. Guiding principles for social responsibility are as follows: to build civil society by providing ideological space for ordinary people to become knowledge producers, to develop their own systems of knowledge and the dissemination of that knowledge, and to forge a more participatory democratic society. (Contains 15 references.) (YLB)

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Conceptualizing our work as Adult Educators In a Socially Responsible Way

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Eight years ago (Cunningham 1988), I made the case that adult education had as its major responsibility to actively promote continuous societal change by promoting the ideals of participatory democracy defined as full citizen participation, freedom, equality and social justice. It seemed quite a straightforward task at the time and I stood on the logic of rationality. The main outline of the argument was: 1. Society is socially constructed. 2. It is logical to assume this construction served certain functions including social control. 3. Many of these social constructions fostered systematic oppression . 4. What is socially constructed can be reconstructed and 5. Education could serve to either promote the status quo and maintain these inequalities or it could be a means to promote changes to more equitable arrangements. Accordingly, the adult educator should eschew professionalism as it delimits citizen participation and the voluntariness necessary for participatory democracy. Nothing that adult educators must make ethical decisions not in some rarified world of abstractions but in the concrete reality of our practice, two questions framed the discourse: 1. Who has the power to make decisions on he nature of adult education programs? and 2. Who do these programs benefit? This was seen as practicing adult education as vocation (Collins).

One year later (Cunningham, 1989), I extended this argument by contrasting the limitations of institutionalized adult education, our present concern in adult education as contrasted against our history where we utilized non-formal education to struggle for a better society. These adult educational programs grew out of popular, socialist and African American social movements as well as workers education, emerging from its own social formations. As Davenport has noted:

> Out of the major historical movements for a more democratic and egalitarian society -- like those of the abolitionists, suffragettes, populists, socialists, race minorities, anarchists and labor organizers grew personal and social transformation.
> A social movement is characterized by a mass effort to reach the minds and hearts of people, to win them over to a new world view, new beliefs that will galvanize them into action and to join in demonstrations against adult education movement is revealed by how formal or informal or unconscious the educational process is (p. 26).

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Increasingly, the concern for working in a socially responsible way has become an issue not only in the United States but internationally as well. The International Council for Adult Education in 1992 for the first time laid out four priorities for their organization: 1. Literacy 2. Peace and Human Rights 3. Women's Issues and 4. Environmental education. These priorities promoting social concerns about inequality were more easily established in the South than in the North and substantial resistance for this vision was articulated by members from the North. And even when there is more discussion, more debate around the goals of Adult Education in the Unite States, the dominant discourse in professionalized adult education which privileges the education of adult in institutions and in the workplace has abandoned the ideals of democratic social action.

There is one reoccurring theme in professionalized adult education today in the United States and that is learning for earning. Education of adults has been increasingly reduced to preparation for work. The preoccupation of the professional field of adult education is human resource development. Universities, community colleges, vocational and technical schools "partner" with business and industry for the purpose of developing a workforce capable of insuring productivity in order that United States industry can be competitive in a global market. This obsession with a competitive work force by adult educators has reduced the field to a concern with productivity for profitability and the advancement of world capitalism masquerading as the free market. Workers have become objectified as human resources; human capital formation which reduces human capacity to its economic value and is highly individualistic in its analysis is accepted uncritically (Baptiste). Workers are isolates who must prepare for multiple changes in their work assignment and an assessment industry of adult counseling has grown up to help workers keep themselves at the ready, rehoning skills in order to stay employed. The Fortune 500 firms shed 4.4 million jobs between 1980 and 1993: however, their sales increased by 1.4 times, assets by 2.3 times, and CEO compensation by 6.1 times (Korten, p. 108). Adult educators now work to assist industry in raising productivity and I would add at any cost to the worker.

UNESCO Institute for Education mounted a two year policy study in 1993 on the relationship between the market, the state, and civil society. The study asked two questions: 1. What was the social demand for adult education? and 2. To what degree could one document the broadening of national adult education policy to encompass civil society? Here we see the concern of where adult education is being utilized--to raise the GNP or to encourage citizen participation.

A major concern emerges in this post modern world. Is the global economy in which multinationals (industries based in several countries) are replaced by rootless transnational companies and in which global capital moves across all national boundaries now in charge. There are arguments on both sides of the question regarding the demise of the state (Murphy), however, there is much interest and agreement on the need to strengthen civil society which brings us back to the social responsibility of adult educators. For whether there is a condition of destatism or simply weakened states, it is not clear that the state can control the market. Thus there remains only one way to rein in the powerful trans nationals, and that is through civil society. Do we work to strengthen the market or do we work to strengthen civil society in order to tame the market. Do we reexamine our definition of work at the same time we critically assess the definition of adult education which has taken us from the promotion of civic participation to a complicitous

role of raising profits at any social cost. Domestically this means uncritical acceptance of technological innovations; it means we do not question down sizing, home officing, out-sourcing, "just in time" strategies, the "temping" of the work force (hiring persons part time to avoid benefit packages), and continued pressure to increase productivity at all costs.

Is there a relationship between what we do and the fact that "between 1982 and 1993 the four hundred richest Americans (sic.) increased their combined net worth from $92 billion to $328 billion more than the combined 1991 GNP's shared by a billion people living in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal." At the same time, 25% of Americans with full time jobs did not earn enough to provide for the basic needs of a family of four (Korsten, p. 109).

This domestic travesty is reproduced internationally by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund which have as their policies, structural adjustment programs (SAPS) which force poor countries to, among other things, trim their social sector (education, health) to pay rich countries interest on the debts often incurred and controlled by their own economic elites. This means that instead of the flow of money going from the North to the South, the greater flow is from poor countries in the South to rich countries of the North. All of this is done in the name of advanced world capitalism with the market in charge.

The options for being socially relevant in 1996 seems to me to be in stark relief. Learning for earning is putting the entire institutional educational system to work for the market to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. If this philosophy dominates adult education then the market is in charge and we participate in the development of oppressive structures.

In the United States, adult education which was, at one time, as much about non-formal and voluntary work in civil society, has through professinoalization, become a force for institutionalizing the education of adults. We have become "schoolers" and our education has become a force for social control. We prepare docile workers; we celebrate technical rationality; our expertise is technique (Collins).

Adult education is no longer a vocation whereby the process of education has an emancipatory goal of participatory democracy. We are instead professional experts and in truth it is a disabling profession, one which forces learners into lifelong dependency on us (Mcknight). This brings us to the issues of post modernism as they have challenged our activities based on rationality.

Post modernism and post structuralism have attacked "rationality", its meta-narratives, its construction of the subject, its lack of micro analysis of power, its inattention to difference, and its Eurocentrism. It is difficult to fault the "logic" of postmodernism but its critique seems to me to exceed its application.

Some modernists try to incorporate postmodernism into their critique. Burbules and Rice distinguishes between post and anti-modernism. Post modernism analysis is compatible with rationality while anti-modernism rejects rationality. These authors suggest dialogue across difference.

> Modernism tends to emphasize universality over particularity and concreteness, and to overlook the ways in which power operates in dialogic relations; it has therefore been overly secure in assuming that fair and equitable concerns can be reached. By taking seriously precisely these matters glossed over in much of modernism, postmodernism makes us more sensitive to the possibility of incommensurability and radical misunderstanding. Public forums are not as open as they may appear from the modern perspective, and it would be naive to think that everyone feels (or is) free to speak in such contexts. Nevertheless, there must be some forums in which individuals from each group who are prepared to take on the burden (and risk) of attempting some degree of communication and transmission across the gulf that divides them (p. 404).

Bromley (1989) suggests that post structuralists critique could be used to make the Marxist analysis more inclusive. This he feels can be done through identity politics which uses post structural insights on the nature of subjectivity without losing the political commitment of Marxism. He defines identity politics as "an attempt to find for collective action a basis which does not marginalize lived experience, especially that of oppressed peoples, a basis which doesn't abstract away the complexity and contradictions embedded in human subjectivity" (p.208)

Identity politics invites individual experience into the analysis, even centering it. But it is not apolitical because it goes beyond experience; experience is contextualized by relating it to structures. An individual's identity is seen as fluid; the Homo (identity) one chooses can contribute to the constitution of the individual as subject. Consciousness, therefore, is a combined product of personal history and the modes of discourse selected to interpret that material history. Through this reasoning Bromley escapes the rejection of rationality.

This view of post-modernism is acceptable to me but post-modernism which negates rationally also negates my straight forward (1988) analysis which I alluded to previously. Post-modernism critique is appropriate and useful but it also presents a problem. Its usefulness is based on its challenge of the over dependence on rationality be it technical, communicative or emancipatory. As Hart notes, "we all need to be emancipated because we all, including critical educators, depend on advanced world capitalism where nobody can make a living if someone doesn't profit from it." (1996, p. 1) She concludes that each of us must locate ourselves in the topography of power and how we participate in its mechanisms.

This is helpful because it forces each of us to examine our own multiple subjectivities; for me it means critically examining the privilege I enjoy and take for granted because I am white or the privilege that obtains because of my social positioning. There is a special meaning in being white in U.S. culture. As African American popular culture notes about life in the states: "If you're white, you're right; if you're black, step back; if you're brown, hang around." Not only is race an issue in and by itself but at it's intersection with class and gender, race again divides. Ham-Garth (1996) has demonstrated how the feminist movement in the U.S. has in truth been two parallel movements with white feminists severing themselves from black feminists on two historical occasions on the basis of race. Accordingly, white feminists have to recognize that black feminists because of the primacy of the oppressive structures of race must stand first of all with black men

(prior to their examination of male-female relationships) and that white feminists must critically examine how their whiteness constructs their social reality, their identity and their view of others. Schick (1994) takes it farther as she notes that the construction of whiteness cannot be examined by a white only approach except as an anthropologist would do so. For those of us who are interested in the political nature of whiteness we have to recognize that whiteness does not exist by itself but that there is a mutual coconstruction of whiteness and non-whiteness. Thus our political analysis must include non-whites; any antiracist discourse starts with this mutuality. Post-modernism is useful when its insights into difference and multiple subjectivities unmasks assumptions of privilege.

Hart (1995) warns us that as popular, critical, radical educators we take up an inherently paternalistic project of education by still ascribing to the model of western rationality underlying the concept of the emancipatory self. Our assumptions about the unemancipated may be as problematic as the stereotypes that were created by Europes enlightened self, a position we must critique as problematic.

Post-modernity has its problems as well as its usefulness. Ellsworth, in her discussion of post modernity notes the danger of multiple subjectivities which leads to inaction because of becoming so enthralled with moving about one's different selves, supporting a kind of contextually, politically, and historically situated politics which may lead to a refusal to know and resist oppression form any a priori line of attacks such as race, class or gender solidarity (113). Hart, building on Ellsworth's concern, notes that mobile subjectivites should not become a new dogma which simply replaces the former unitary self with the same resulting refication and objectification leading to inaction (p. 13).

Breton and Plumb (1992) studying the East European experience take their post-modernism cue from Vaclov Havel who points out that the power of the powerless lies not in directly confronting the system but by denying it in principle by choosing to live in the truth and refusing to live in the lie.

> The point where living with the truth ceases to be a mere negation of living with the lie, and becomes articulate in a particular way is the point at which something is born that might be called the independent, spiritual, social and political life of society. This independent life is not separated from the rest of life...by some sharply defined line. Both types frequently coexist in the same people. Nevertheless, its most important focus is made by a high degree of inner emancipation. It sails upon the vast ocean of the manipulated life, like little boats, tossed by the waves but always bobbing back as viable messengers of living within the truth, articulating the suppressed aims of life (Havel quoted by Breton and Plumb, p. 23).

By rejecting the universalizing structure of the system and creating small face to face parallel structures, Breton and Plumb believe we can escape the despair of the postmodernist condition. "Living within the truth" contributes to movements whose primary purpose is always to have an impact on society, not to affect the power structure. This living with the truth unmasks

the real nature of power. This emphasis on the internal processes as a substitute or far better way then confronting oppression directly appears problematic to me. Consciousness is formed through action and though there are historical times where direct action may not be inappropriate, I do not want to sacrifice the standpoint of direct action against oppressive structures provided by the meta-narrative whereby conflict brings about social change.

So I return to praxis as the means to inform what I do though I concur that our guides to action can be informed by post-modernity and its critique. There are ways of directly confronting our tasks in a socially responsible way. The building of civil society and the voluntary sector requires participation. Dominant knowledges need to be confronted by knowledges created by marginalized persons. This is not through some fractionated work performed by individuals with no clear indicators of rightness and wrongness. Socially responsible adult educators still have a clear task before us. Capitalism, competition, myths of free markets can be challenged; at this historical moment the importance of civil society seems to be abundantly clear. It is also abundantly clear that the market has overstepped its usefulness in contributing to the greater good of a healthy environment and a quality of life that embraces all citizens.

To build civil society through providing ideological space for ordinary people to become knowledge producers, to develop their own systems of knowledge and the dissemination of that knowledge and to critically and in a communitarian way forge a more participatory democratic society are guiding principles for social responsibility.

If in fact we are between paradigms of modernity and post modernity the shift is not clear, until that time when there is more evidence for a far better way, social responsibility calls us to use post-modern thought to sharpen our critique but to promote education and action for democratic social change within a rational discourse.

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